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# Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies

## Paper 79

### **The Intimacy of Persecution: Gossip, Stereotype, and Violence**

by

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# **The Intimacy of Persecution: Gossip, Stereotype, and Violence**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Persecution and communal violence present methodological challenges for researchers of violence. One such challenge lies in connecting persecutor and victim, as well as macro- and micro- factors. Part of the solution, we suggest may come from adapting approaches of linguistic anthropology to gossip and ‘everyday talk’. We propose that persecution has two poles: collective (in which the persecutors are generally not acquainted with their victims) and intimate (in which the persecutors are generally well acquainted through day-to-day or other meaningful contact with their victims). Analyzing intimate persecution of ‘sorcerers’ and ‘Chinese’ in Indonesia, we suggest that gossip and everyday talk enables stereotypes to be ‘pinned on’ certain acquaintances. The findings we suggest are exploratory, possibly contributing to a more nuanced method for understanding intimate persecution more generally.

Keywords: Persecution, Gossip, Indonesia [8009]

## **INTRODUCTION**

Socio-cultural anthropology is often conceived of as the study of big themes in little places. It is thus not surprising that when anthropologists have turned to the issue of violence, we have been concerned with how, what might be called macro-historical factors, play out in local violent events. Background historical forces include political-economy (the intersection of wealth and power), moral economy (people’s expectations for how others in the economy

should behave), and oligarchy (the role of elites). Relying primarily on interviews, surveys, and historical data, what seems missing in these accounts of violence is the role of everyday talk.

In this article we contend that methods of analysis from linguistic anthropology (LA) might engender a deeper understanding of persecution. In particular, analyzing everyday talk may allow us to link large scale, macro-historical structural change, stereotypes and what we call the ‘intimate persecution’ of actual persons. Expressed simply, everyday talk, especially in the form of gossip, often focuses on transgressions of norms (Besnier 2009). In gossip and talk more generally stereotypes can become a crucial resource used in the construction of someone as a transgressor (Wortham 2006), while transgressors become victims of persecution when such talk occurs in times of uncertainty and rapid social change.

The setting in which we seek to understand the relationship of everyday talk to violence is Indonesia. Scholars have particularly focused on violence associated with large scale structural change in Indonesia. Such violence occurred with the Revolution and struggle for Independence 1945-49 (Lucas 1985); the 1965-1966 massacres of members and supporters of the Communist Party (Cribb 1990; Roosa 2006); state violence associated with the subsequent regime of President Soeharto (Budiman 1990); and the turmoil of the years 1997-2002, commonly associated with the reform movement (*Reformasi*).

Reformasi accounted for significant structural change. Van Klinken (2007) suggests that five types of violence characterized the period. Social violence included inter-village brawls and the lynching of thieves and ‘sorcerers’. Localized communal riots included anti-Chinese riots. ‘Terrorist’ acts are associated with the Bali Bombings of 2002. Secessionist violence occurred in East Timor, Aceh, and Papua. Finally, large-scale communal (‘ethnic’ or ‘religious’) violence, such as between Christians and Muslims, or Dayak and Madurese ethnic groups, accounted for over half of the 19,000 deaths of the period. The existing

literature presents great insights into violence in Indonesia (e.g. Bertrand 2004; Coppel 2006; Davidson and Henley 2007; Hedman 2008; Kingsbury and Aveling 2003; Min 2006; Purdey 2006; Schlehe 2004). So in this article, we merely suggest that analysis of gossip and everyday talk from an LA perspective might provide an additional approach that can help us understand persecution.

To demonstrate connection between historical structure and local persecution, our method is to reinterpret data taken from two anthropological studies undertaken in two locations in Java during times of rapid structural change, uncertainty and violence. The two studies were carried out for 12 months (2000-2001) in Banyuwangi (Author 2) and for 26 months (1996-1998) in Semarang (Author 1). We contend that gossip is central process in intimate persecution (in this case, of sorcerers and Chinese), and that this process is also reliant upon locals' knowledge of widely circulating negative stereotypes. To make this argument we first elaborate the links between persecution and gossip and stereotype via reference to work in linguistic anthropology (LA). Following this we briefly look at the stereotypes of the sorcerer and Chineseness in Indonesia before exploring how the ideas of gossip and stereotype can be applied to two settings in Indonesia. We conclude by suggesting how our findings might help to develop an anthropology of persecution.

## **PERSECUTION, GOSSIP, AND STEREOTYPE**

In studying persecution, it is possible to make a rather arbitrary division. Where persecutor and persecuted are acquainted with each other we could characterize the relationship as intimate persecution; where they are not, we could say it is collective. Most violent persecution could be said to occur somewhere along these poles. We suggest that gossip is closely tied to intimate persecution. In the first place, we see gossip as talk about others. Following Besnier (2009) we define gossip as evaluative morally laden verbal

exchanges concerning the conduct of absent third parties, which have real, often, negative consequences for those being gossiped about, while providing the social glue that binds gossipers as members of an in-group. This allows us to separate gossip from conversational narratives on the basis of the repercussions that gossip can have on the person gossiped about. Typically gossip comprises a series of communicative events, involving multiple participants. Responsibility for the content of gossip thus becomes hard to assign.

Aside from vilification, gossip helps to define insiders and outsiders, allowing us to analyze gossip as a political tool (Besnier 2009). In doing so, we also follow Besnier's lead by relating gossip to structural change. What we mean by "structural change" is the impact of global events on the local (e.g. currency devaluations, pressures to reduce subsidies and trade barriers, etc.) and inter-related events such as challenges to political regimes (e.g. demonstrations about rising food prices that were previously not tolerated and quashed with violence).

Stereotype has been an underlying concept in much recent LA work on semiotics and language ideology (e.g. Agha 2007; Inoue 2006; Miller 2004). What seems common to all these studies is that for local ideas about social types to become more widely circulating stereotypes requires a number of processes. The first is that semiotic information about a social type needs to be reproduced in what Agha (2007) refers to as "one-to-many participation framework", such as a news broadcaster (the "one" of this framework) which broadcasts to multiple participants in multiple locations (the "many" of participation frameworks). This process produces an emergent stereotype that is associated with a certain set of embodied behaviors. For this stereotype to solidify it needs to be repeated in other social domains (e.g. radio, school curriculum, newspapers, and magazines). Our focus primarily – though not exclusively – relates to how widely circulating stereotypes are activated in a local context.

Work on language ideologies has shown that the type of semiotic information that constitutes stereotypes often finds itself entwined in everyday talk and attached to local persons (e.g. Inoue 2006; Wortham 2006). A common finding of work on one form of everyday talk, namely storytelling, is that stories relate back to an event that occurred in a way the teller did not expect (Bauman 2004; Berman 1998; Georgakopoulou 2007; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Ochs and Capps 2001). This breach of expectations then generates a telling about the event and the persons involved, which functions to help the teller and listeners to understand why the event occurred. At the same time the story tellers position themselves as exemplars of local moral codes. In contrast, the person who broke these expectations is positioned as immoral or deviant.

Such conversational work is quite intricate. It relies upon obtaining and maintaining an audience and in constructing the persona of the transgressor (who is often not present) in a way that the transgressor appears different to others listening to the story while positioning the storyteller as socially the same as their audience. To build the identity of the antagonist their embodied behaviors are often equated with the embodied behaviors of widely known stereotypes (Wortham 2006). This equational work constructs the antagonist's behavior as "different" to that of the teller and audience. For this social pursuit of sameness and difference (Bucholtz and Hall 2004) to become gossip requires two further steps. The first is not only getting the audience on side but to have members make contributions in such a way that responsibility for this positioning cannot easily be assigned to any person in particular (Besnier 2009). Second, where talk takes the above-mentioned form, where the positioning of the antagonist is primarily negative or deviant, and where stories about deviance also have links to prior stories about deviance, then the event has turned from one of conversational storytelling to one of gossip.

## SORCERERS AND CHINESENESS

The two stereotypes we study are that of the ‘sorcerer’ and the ‘ethnic Chinese’. Images of witches and sorcerers widely circulate in Indonesia popular culture. Sorcery belief is widespread—although whether people will openly admit this belief is another matter. Ideas regarding witches and sorcery seem invigorated by several nation-wide journals devoted to the *supernatural* world. These discuss, among other things, ghosts, love magic, magical amulets, and the powers of life and death associated with witches and sorcerers. Different ethnic groups tend to have their own stereotypes. In Banyuwangi (A2’s fieldwork location), all ethnic groups—Javanese, Madurese, and Osing—conceive of the ‘sorcerer’ as an older man or woman devoted to the black arts. They engage in mysterious acts such as rolling naked in the cemetery at night and use this power to cause misfortune—often including death in others. The process typically occurs if a person, usually an intimate, is involved in perceived altercations which are followed by the misfortune of other parties. The persecution involves pinning the stereotype of a sorcerer to the person allegedly responsible for this misfortune.

A similar process can occur for people identified as ethnic Chinese. The contemporary Chinese stereotypes have been circulating in Indonesia since the late 1800s (e.g. Coppel 1983; Purdey 2006). The stereotypes are rarely positive and typically point to a range of practices and dispositions, such as tightfistedness, opportunism, profiteering, price gouging, business people or traders, lack of patriotism, corrupters of Indonesian bureaucrats, and so on. In the case of ‘sorcerer’ persecution, the alleged sorcerer is usually identified on the basis of altercation and misfortune. With the Chinese it is based on appearance (*mata sipit* ‘slanty eyes’; pale skin); religion (Protestant, Catholic, Confucianism); location of residence, accent, language use more generally, and of course use of Chinese scripts. But again, persecution requires attaching one or more of these elements to a transgressor. Clearly large scale change



of Reformasi was important in understanding the violence in both cases. Yet it appears to us that local, intimate relationships may also play have a part. And where intimacy does characterize the persecution, we will argue, conversational work might be crucial. We consider this in relation to ‘sorcerers’ in Banyuwangi and then ‘Chinese’ in Semarang.

### **INTIMATE PERSECUTION IN BANYUWANGI**

Situated in Java’s far east, Banyuwangi District had a population of 1,451,141 in 1998. Islam is the majority religion, and belief in magic is widespread. Many informants reported that magic belief constituted a crucial part of Islam. Magic is thought to be of two kinds. White magic is typically associated with creating good fortune, especially in matters pertaining to love. We could think of black magic as sorcery. The people identified as sorcerers usually claim to be innocent. This is understandable as suspected sorcerers are sometimes killed. As sorcerers do not identify themselves, they have to be identified by others. This process of identification usually occurs in secret and the people who identify them are their own neighbors, family members and friends. Roughly the stages in the identification of a sorcerer are an initial suspicion from within the realm of family, friends, and neighbors, the involvement of a shaman in diagnosing or prognosticating the cause of the illness, then a spreading of news about this ‘discovery’.

In Tegalaring, the village of around 5,000 people in which I did fieldwork, ten or so people were infamous as sorcerers. ‘Sorcerers’ are reviled because they’re believed to cause misfortune and death in others. A variety of measures are taken against sorcerers. These include banishing sorcerers from the community, throwing stones on their roof sometimes, and/or, compelling them to undertake a kind of ritual called a shrouded oath (*sumpah pocong*) Aside from these, the most effective measure is killing the sorcerer. Two kinds of ‘victims’ thus emerge. First is the people who believe themselves bewitched (or, more

appropriately, ensorcelled). Second is the sorcerer, who is killed in retaliation. In both cases, you fear those who are closest to you. The sorcerer targets neighbors, family and friends. And those who kill the sorcerer are usually led by some of the sorcerer's own neighbors, family, and friends.

Killings usually occur infrequently. In most villages that I visited, informants could remember at least two or three killings over the past decades, sometimes as far back as the Dutch colonial period. Aside from these infrequent killings, at certain pivotal times, killings have become so frequent that we could use the term "outbreak". One such period was from early February to the end of September 1998. During this time around 100 sorcerers were killed, and more were injured or banished.

The 1998 outbreak can be attributed mostly to three factors. First, there was an instruction to help 'sorcerers' relocate. The Banyuwangi district head was a military man, as was usually the case with district heads in this period, who liked having order in their district. It seems he found out there had been a killing in February and then made an announcement to all his underlings in the local villages, that all the 'sorcerers' should be given the opportunity to relocate. Officials were to facilitate this relocation. Local residents understood this to be a sign that the government was finally cracking down on sorcerers.

Second was *Reformasi*. In April after almost 30 years of autocratic rule, suddenly there was a democratic flowering. In spite of several brutal crackdowns, demonstrations in the urban centers (far removed from Banyuwangi) became increasingly frequent in April-May, and thereafter became a constant feature. Some of my informants mentioned that they had seen *demo* (demonstrations) televised from the big cities and now there was the *kesempatan* (opportunity) to undertake killings themselves. Third, once the killings started in 1998, the state was ineffective in stopping them. Local residents thought the local police were either unwilling or unable to stop the killings. This apparently provided more impetus to kill.

Part of the challenge of this research lies in linking the macro with the micro. When I conducted fieldwork, which admittedly was after the killings had occurred, people linked these to the demonstrations in the cities. They used the words “demo” to describe actions against sorcerers including mobbing at their house and taking sorcerers out and killing them. This is the same word they used, for example, to explain the actions, especially against Chinese that had occurred in the cities. Thus by describing the killings of sorcerers as “demo”, local residents linked macro-historical changes in Indonesia to local events.

The other problem here is identification. Unlike the identification of Chinese, which can sometimes be traced to physical appearance, ‘sorcerers’ are in practice indistinguishable from others. According to local people, sorcerers may be identified through a feeling, a dream, or a shaman’s prognostication. For the researcher, it seems that gossip is crucial in identifying someone as a sorcerer. The term local people use to describe such gossip is the rather formal sounding “community information” (*informasi masyarakat*).

One thing gossip does very effectively is equate a stereotype with a certain person. In gossip, people congregate and contribute ideas about the sorcerer that become accepted by all involved. As Besnier (2009) observes, “gossiping is a joint effort involving many participants, and the authorship of particular gossip stories is fundamentally blurred”. The more talk there is about a sorcerer, the more the idea is enhanced by embellishments and inaccuracies. As Herskovits (cited in Gluckman 1963) notes with regard to gossip, “fantasy supplements or even supplants fact.” A good example of this that I have drawn from my field notes on interviews is of a case when an administrative hamlet head (HH) was talking to Pak Haji (PH) and me about three alleged sorcerers:

HH: As for the [three] others they weren't wrong. It was information from the precinct, from the community. I'm not going to say they were sorcerers because there isn't proof, it was only the attention of the community that they possessed sorcery.

PH: It wasn't just the neighborhood, it was all of Tegalaring.

HH: All of Tegalaring knew alright.

The participant in this exchanged quickly and slightly shifted his opinion from saying there was no proof to the point where he accepted that the entire community 'knew'. It could be interpreted as pressure from Pak Haji, but it seemed to me that he was moving from an official position of 'no proof' to his personal opinion that they were sorcerers.

Aside from social identification, gossip functions to spread knowledge and impressions about how widely known this type of knowledge is within a community. To quote one informant, "all the community, the whole village was aware." How do they all become aware that somebody is supposedly a sorcerer? This knowledge spreads through word of mouth. Indeed, most informants insisted that they did not really know whether the alleged sorcerer was really guilty, but that they had "only heard all about it" (*dengar-dengar*). Of course, in some cases this did not stop them from taking part in killing the person. Social identification and the spreading of knowledge thus often occur simultaneously.

In summary, at one end of the pole of persecution you have intimate persecution. With regard to the persecution of 'sorcerers', gossip plays an important role in three ways: through linking the macro- with the micro-, through social identification, and through spreading information. Having sketched out this process, in the next section we wish to show how LA might provide a more detailed insight into this process.

## MOVING TOWARD INTIMATE PERSECUTION VIA TALK

The data that I present here was gathered during two-and-a-half years of fieldwork in two *rukun tetangga* (wards) in Semarang between April 1996 and July 1998 (Author 1, 2010). Here I focus on the talk that occurred in monthly ward meetings in Ward 8, where I lived. This middle-income ward was primarily populated by tertiary educated middle echelon public servants and was part of a recently established government housing estate designed for low to middle-income public servants. Within this ward there were a high number of unoccupied houses, which negatively impacted on the ward's ability to build and maintain ward infrastructure. These concerns together with local concerns and national events had a negative impact on ward social life and talk, culminating in the construction of one ward member as a deviant Indonesian-Chinese, who was not only similar to the widely circulating stereotypical stingy Indonesian-Chinese but who was also deserving of verbal abuse.

During the course of this fieldwork Indonesia's economic and political stability began to unravel. On the one hand, Indonesia's development programs had produced increasing disparities between the rich and the poor (Chua 2004; Purdey 2006). On the other, the end of the cold war meant prior agreements about allowing protectionism in exchange for a staunchly non-communist regime gave way to increased pressures from the USA and other countries for trade liberalization and human rights, which also brought economic uncertainty for many already struggling Indonesians (Vickers 2005). The twenty years of sustained growth in GDP had also fostered the emergence of middle-class students who began to seek a cleaner and transparent government free of corruption and collusion (Vickers 2005). Some of the main targets of criticism were Indonesians of Chinese ancestry who had historically been seen as aloof, unpatriotic, economic exploiters of 'native' Indonesians and Indonesia (Purdey 2006).

The reproduction of these negative stereotypes was aided by country-wide telecasts in 1990 and 1995 where some of the wealthiest Chinese from large companies were asked by President Soeharto to give substantial amounts of money to co-operatives and to the increasing numbers of poor (Chua 2004; Purdey 2006). In linking these representations with their uptake, Purdey (2006) points out that after the 1995 televised event there were a number of occurrences of mass violence in Java that were directed towards signs associated with Chineseness - such signs included shops, shopping malls, churches, Buddhist shrines, houses and property in areas perceived to have high numbers of Indonesian-Chinese – as well as those perceived to be of Chinese ancestry.

In the months leading up to the December 1996 and January 1997 ward meetings the tranquility of what was otherwise viewed as a safe and desirable place to live was threatened through a number of robberies and unwanted intrusions in the ward and the promise of marauding supporters during the upcoming election. These concerns made their way into talk in the December meeting along with more general discussions relating to youth crime and drug usage, anxieties about the social unrest that would come with the upcoming elections, and talk about how to ensure that the security guard could be relied upon to do his job during this ‘dangerous’ period. The January meeting was held during the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan. During this time messages of giving to the poor and less fortunate were common in newspapers, television serials, soap operas, and in sermons given at the mosque in the evenings and at Friday’s prayer. During Ramadan the cost of living also increased contributing to pressure on family budgets. In addition, at the end of Ramadan this ward held a celebration, which also required monetary contributions from each family.

For the families of Ward 8, these financial pressures were added to by the need to pay for the recent construction of a guard post and for a full-time security guard to attend this post in the evenings. In addition, there were also a number of other infrastructure improvements

that became necessary during this time. These included the surfacing of the unsealed road that ran through the ward. This road was in desperate need of repair due to the damage caused by an increasingly large amount of traffic and the ongoing heavy rains during the wet season. These rains also caused regular minor flooding in this and adjoining wards because the drainage was regularly blocked with silt and garbage.

Because of flooding and the increasing occurrence of serious water-born mosquito diseases, such as dengue fever, the drains also needed to be cleaned. Again, this required further financial contributions by ward members. All of these local circumstances relating to the financial needs of the ward also came at a time when only about half the twenty-three families in this ward attended ward meetings and made financial contributions towards all of these costs. Indeed, there was no way that ward finances could even cover one infrastructure project, as we will hear from a number of the ward members. In what follows we dip into the talk that occurred in two meetings to see how it interfaces with these local circumstances, national events and widely circulating negative stereotypes of Chineseness.

### **The December meeting: talk, categories, and stories**

In this section I focus on talk during a routine male ward meeting that occurred in December 1996. Like most ward meetings this meeting took place in the front room of the host's house. Of the eleven members who attended this meeting those who attended earlier meetings without fail only included Taufik, Pujianto, Abdurrahman, Marwito, Joko, Naryono and myself (all names are pseudonyms). Dono, Giono and three other members not present at this meeting (Sumaryono, Feizel, and Matius) attended these meetings every few months. Kris and Tri had not attended a meeting since I began attending in April 1996.

During the first ten minutes of this two hour meeting interaction among participants related to the collecting of monthly dues and talking about the new guard post. Most of the

material for the guard post was purchased on a credit basis from a hardware store owned by Kris, who is not present at this or the next meeting. One item discussed was that a new resident, Roi, wants permission for large trucks to regularly pick-up and deliver merchandise. (Roi and Kris are names that are often associated with Christianity, which is also associated with widely circulating stereotypes of Chineseness.) Sunaryono asked for input about this matter because of the damage that heavy trucks would do to the ward road.

Reiterating immediately preceding talk (by Tri, Dono and Joko), Pujianto suggested that they should only allow Roi to use small domestic-sized vehicles to transport merchandise because of the damage large trucks may cause and the subsequent financial burden on the ward. Tri officially seconded this idea. He did this through the recounting of a story about his experience with a neighbor from another ward after Tri erected a metal pole in the middle of the road.

Through the discussion participants together identified Kris as a trader. Although “trader” as a social type could equally be read as involving Indonesians who are not of Chinese-ancestry, with recourse to enduring stereotypes some might also interpret “trader” as “someone of Chinese-ancestry”. In this sense, stereotypes are entwined in local talk. While some of those present may already have known about Kris’s Chinese-ancestry, the result of this talk is that all would identify Chineseness as one aspect of Kris’s identity. Such a reading becomes increasingly possible as “trader” continues to be used and modified in subsequent talk during this meeting. Indeed, in the talk that follows in Extract 1, we see Tri’s talk helping to add further characteristics to “traders” in general.

***Extract 1: Linking traders with deviance***

Tri

1     Makanya, nanti pak, secara tegas saja. Saya     So later we have to be firm, I’m right



2 di belakang Pak RT lah saya nanti (???) behind the head of the ward (???) I've  
3 saya sudah matur pak lurah itu, dan pak already asked the sub-district head, the sub-  
4 lurah nyetujui dia. Hanya karena kan district head agreed but he only, right,  
5 kadang kadang, pengaturan itu kan. "Yo ra sometimes because rules "yeah [I] don't  
6 ngerti lah", nek wong dagang itu kan nganu understood", if it is a trader right? Um  
7 ngga ngerti yang jelas. Pengaturan itu [they] don't understand clearly these sorts  
8 mereka ngga bisa tegas, karena, kurang of rules right, the sub-district finds it hard  
9 jujur bisa masuk. to be firm because sometimes they are not  
entirely honest and enter [the ward].

Dono

10 Iya. Yes.

In the above talk Tri and Dono continue to jointly build upon the previous identity category of trader by associating it with deviance. They also now directly associate deviance with a named person. In this case, Roi is now imagined to be someone who might oppose the ward's decision and bring along some support. In doing so, we can see how Roi's identity becomes entwined with more enduring stereotypes, especially the *cukong* relationship where Indonesian-Chinese business people pay protection money to government officials, such as military and police personnel.

As the talk progresses we find that Tri, Dono and Adi note that Roi's trucks have actually already begun to arrive late at night, despite no official permission being given. This establishes relationships with earlier talk, especially that of the trader who does not follow rules (e.g. Extract 1). After noting that the ward has already been quite generous in their dealings with traders in this ward, Tri jovially notes that one example of this lenience was with Kris, who is now also more directly positioned as deviant in the following talk.

Tri		
1	Dulu pak kris nggak betul loh pak itu, Itu	A while ago Mr. Kris's [behavior] wasn't
2	nggak betul itu, iya itu, jalan nutup.	appropriate. It wasn't appropriate. Yeah, the road was closed.
Giono		
3	Pojok sisan.	And right at the end [at the entrance to the ward].
Tri		
4	Untuk gawé usaha pojok sisan.	Used to do business, and it was right at the end [that is, the ward entrance]
Giono		
5	Pojok sisan. Tapi tempat, tempat.	And it was right at the [ward] entrance. But the place, the place.
Tri		
6	Tapi sumber dana jadi (laughs).	But it was a source of income right?
Giono		
7	Tempat belokan (laughs).	Right at the corner.

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recent break-ins, drunken youth and general ward insecurity – the topic turned to payments toward the guard post. At this stage Kris is again mentioned as the person from whom the ward has bought all the material for the guard post, resulting in a debt of 700,000 rupiah. We also hear that there are many absentee landlords who haven't paid their obligatory 40,000 rupiah toward the guard post. In doing so, the local categories of payer and non-payer of ward dues are constructed.

In sum, through the positioning of others as non-normative or deviant, those doing the positioning are inferring that they themselves are persons who do not fit this category. As such we not only have the construction of a local deviant social type, but we also have the emergence of the opposite social type, namely those who are considered non-deviant or ideal in this ward context. We also see how stereotypes of Chineseness potentially become entwined in the talk. Even so, the reading of some of these behaviors as 'Chinese' is still ambiguous. In the following meeting, which I discuss below, similar types of talk occur at a time when the authorization of public anti-Chinese sentiment was increasingly common. This helped make the thus far implied readings of Chinese personhood and deviance less ambiguous. In the above instances of talk we also saw how multiple participants became involved in the social identification and negative positioning of Kris. By involving seven of the eleven participants over time, this talk thus seems to be moving from everyday talk toward gossip because responsibility for this positioning has increasingly become shared. In the next section we will see how this talk solidifies as gossip and then moves to what we call "verbal persecution". Verbal persecution involves the racialization of Kris, the explicit linking of this racialization with behaviors typically associated with circulating negative stereotypes of Chineseness, and the making of a threat of an angry confrontation with Kris.

### **From gossip to threats of verbal persecution: the January 1997 meeting**

In this section we look at the routine meeting that occurred one month after the meeting discussed above. In particular, we focus on how Kris's emerging identity as a stingy non-attending trader and ward member solidifies. As noted earlier, during this time there was a large increase in negative representations of Chinese-Indonesians and this co-occurred with the ward's financial situation and the Islamic fasting month. In this meeting there are just nine participants, seven of whom were at the previous December meeting (Tri, Dono and Giono are not present). Kris is again not present despite being invited both orally and in writing. During the early part of this meeting non-attendance is linked to the ward's financial situation. In doing so, we can see links with categories from the December meeting, especially those of attendee and non-attendee, payer and non-payer of ward dues. We also see how these local categories relate to the ward's finances and the financial burden low attendance places on those who attend. All those present are also reminded that the ward still owes Kris 250,000 rupiah for the material that was used for the building of the guard post.

While in the talk immediately preceding Extract 3 a number of ward members are named as non-contributors, Kris becomes the focus of discussion through recounts of his financial contribution toward the construction of the guard post and his ownership of three houses. In doing so, we also see other links to categories that emerged in the previous meeting, especially those relating to generosity-stinginess and wealthy-ordinary folk. This discussion involves Joko and Feizel (the ward treasurer), who was not present at the December meeting.

#### ***Extract 3: Repeating prior talk: Kris as a non-attender, potential stinger and businessperson***

Joko

- 1     Saur sauré kas niku? Kasé sing ora iso     Pay the debt, the debt from [ward] cash?

2      nyaur.

The [ward] cash is not sufficient to pay  
the debt.

Feizel

3 Pak kris ini, dia sekali sekali suruh This Mr. Kris, he should be told to attend  
4 hadirilah. every once in a while.

Joko

5     Sudah saya pesen ok.                      Actually, I've already told him.

Feizel

6   Ndak pernah hadir. Nanti saya ngomong   He has never been present. I'll talk to him  
7   supaya nyumbang lagilah.               so he donates some more.

Joko

8      Sudah saya pesen.                                  I've already told him.

Feizel

9      (???) sama sama, orang kita kita ini.      (???) same, the same as us here.

Joko

[illegible]

Feizel

12 Kan pengusaha itu. He is a business person, right!

In the above talk we can see that Feizel's reference to Kris's non-attendance (lines 3-4 and 6), his need to donate again (line 7) and his positioning as a businessperson (line 12) has links with prior talk in this meeting and talk in the December meeting. Moreover, this talk helps to further solidify categories of non-payers, donators (line 7), business people or traders (line 12), and those who do and don't work for the common good of the ward (lines 1-4),

while also linking them directly with named persons in the ward, in this case Kris. At this stage there is also the emergence of potential links between the ward's financial woes, Kris and businesspersons as a category of persons who should donate. During the fasting month "give to the poor" was a message for all wealthy persons and in this sense we could see a further intertwining between widely circulating stereotypes of social relations and local social relations. Similarly, there were also potential links with the idea of wealthy Chinese business people as a group who should give more to the poor. As with earlier extracts, this positioning of Kris as someone who should donate more is a joint effort, in this case involving two participants.

The positioning of Kris as someone who should donate more, further solidifies in the talk immediately following that represented in Extract 3, which revives the discussion started in the December meeting concerning Kris's contribution and generosity. In this talk Kris's contribution is initially compared with Pak Tri's and described as insufficient and then later compared with Islamic charity and again described as insufficient using an Islamic moral yardstick. During this time the financial ability between those present at the meeting and Kris is also highlighted and this helps to further solidify categories of wealthy and ordinary folk, while continuing to become further entwined with more enduring stereotypes of Chineseness (e.g. businesspersons who should give to the less fortunate). As with the talk in the previous meeting, we also see that over the course of time additional participants contribute to this discussion (Pujianto and Taufik). Again this also helps to make it hard to assign responsibility for this talk, which is fast turning into gossip vis-a-vis the negative positioning of someone by multiple participants across time. While to this stage of the meeting representations of Kris seemed to be still quite respectable or at least somewhat neutral, in the talk that follows Kris becomes more explicitly positioned as an uncaring Chinese business

person. This talk occurs directly after Feizel suggests that Kris doesn't need to take profits from his community.

***Extract 4: Kris as an uncaring Chinese business person***

Joko

- |   |                                      |  |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Saben minggu eh saben apa itu, sabtu | Each week, eh, each what is it Saturday,       |
| 2 | hari sabtu mesti nagih itu.          | Saturday [he] routinely comes to debt collect. |

Feizel

- |   |          |                     |
|---|----------|---------------------|
| 3 | Makanya. | Exactly [my point]. |
|---|----------|---------------------|

Joko

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 4 | Dia mesti nagih, kalau sabtu mesti nagih | He always debt collects on Saturday, he |
| 5 | itu.                                     | always debt collects.                   |

Feizel

- |   |                                      |   |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| 6 | Orang kaya gitu kalau ndak diberi    | People like that, if they are not told then |
| 7 | pengertian, ndak ngerti dia. Ya kan, | they just don't understand, right? All      |
| 8 | bisnis terus jalan, kaya gitu ok.    | [they] know is business, it is like that.   |

Pujianto

- |    |                                    |                                       |
|----|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 9  | Bisnis saja, (termasuk ngrencanaké | Just business, (including planning??) |
| 10 | kok??)                             |                                       |

Feizel

- |    |                                    |                                       |
|----|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 11 | Kalau dia mau hadir, mau dirembug, | If he wanted to attend [meetings] and |
| 12 | digini mau aja.                    | negotiate, that would be OK.          |

Taufik

- |    |                                     |                                      |
|----|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 13 | Apa karena cines itu ya? Apa karena | Is it because [he] is Chinese? Is it |
|----|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|

14 cines itu?

because he is Chinese?

Feizel

15 Iya, karena itu. Orang cina paling dagang. Yes, because of that. All Chinese do is do business.

Joko's reminder that Kris never misses an opportunity to debt collect is quickly followed by other negative representations of Kris. In this case, someone who is only interested in money and business and not the condition of his ward's finances (lines 6-10). More importantly, however, is the now explicit racialization of Kris as Chinese (lines 13-15), where Taufik ponders whether such deviant or strange behavior is due to Kris's Chineseness. In doing so, this talk seems to disambiguate earlier social identification which suggested Kris may have been of Chinese ancestry, while also explicitly linking all the non-desirable and non-normative behaviors within this ward (e.g. non-donor, non-attender of meetings, wealthy stingy folk, et cetera) to Kris as an exemplar of Chineseness via the use of two words, *Cines* and *Cina* (Chinese) (lines 13-15).

While the first use of the term *cines* might have been a result of Taufik not wishing to invoke the racist connotations associated with the term *Cina*, Feizel appears to interpret Taufik's *Cines* in a negative way with Taufik not correcting this interpretation in subsequent turns. As the talk continues Kris's negative behavior is also contrasted with that of others which also points to what Feizel, Taufik and Joko think should be the case. In particular, we hear about Sunardi, who lives in another nearby low-income ward (and who is incidentally a trader who is not of Chinese ancestry). Sunardi is presented as similar to those present at the meeting and an ideal person who never debt-collects despite very large debts and a low income. He and his generous behavior is contrasted with Kris, who continues to be positioned as someone who debt collects every week without fail, despite his privileged economic



circumstances. This talk serves to solidify emerging local stereotypes relating to wealthy stingy and non-Muslim folk and those who are poor but generous and Moslem.

Without reproducing the rest of the talk, which goes on for another three minutes, the positioning of Kris continues and with it the further entwining of local circumstances and ideas about morality and normativity with wider circulating stereotypes. Multiple participants also continue to be involved. This talk then becomes verbal persecution as Feizel threatens to engage in verbal conflict with Kris the next time they meet, as in the talk represented in Extract 5. This talk is immediately preceded by Joko recounting, yet again, how his meeting with Kris involved talk about the ward's debt and a reminder for Kris to come the meeting.

***Extract 5: I'm going to verbally confront Kris***

Feizel

1 Kalau saya ke sana, saya semprot. If I go there, I will confront him.

Joko

2 Coba tu pak. Why don't we try...

Feizel

3 Semprot (???) cina, cina gitu kalau ndak Confront (???) Chinese, Chinese like that,  
4 disemprot, kita dibikin apa. if we don't confront [them], we will be  
ignored.

Pujianto

5 Nggak mau dateng ya, utangnya tu nggak [If he] doesn't want to attend [the  
6 ditagih. Nggak usah ditagih, tapi kita juga monthly meeting], [then] he doesn't need  
7 tidak juga tidak mau ngemplang to debt collect, and he doesn't need to  
collect [because] the ward doesn't [mean]  
not to pay [because we are waiting on

him to pay his debts to the ward].

On lines 1 and 3-4 we see that Feizal now threatens to verbally confront Kris through his use of *semprot* which literally means “to spray something”, but in this case “to be close enough to someone to spray them in saliva”. Feizal now justifies such a confrontation because of Kris’s Chineseness. Here we can see how non-normative behaviors that have been associated with Kris through the talk that has occurred over two meetings now morphs into a direct equation between Kris and the widely circulating negative stereotype of Chinese-Indonesians. In this sense, Kris as a local person has now been replaced with Kris as just another example of an undesirable stereotypical Chinese-Indonesian persona.

In closing this section it is important to point out that while there were many debtors and non-attenders in this ward, as well as one other Chinese-Indonesian family, none of these ward members were the object of the type of gossip or verbal persecution presented here. Although there were many complex events that impacted on ward life from 1997, this verbal persecution did not develop further into what we call, “intimate persecution” where there was actual violence. This was despite rising popular protests leading up to and after the then President Soeharto was re-elected in May-1997 and after the effects of the Asian economic crisis that began in mid-1997 also began to be felt throughout Indonesia, including in this and other nearby wards. Social unrest was also on the rise with outbreaks of communal violence across Indonesia occurring in January, February, March, May and September of 1997 and many more in 1998 (e.g. Purdey 2006: 219-220).

While I have no actual data that explicitly supports this, it seems that Kris avoided violent recriminations because his wife was a staunch ward member (she was the treasurer for the parallel women’s organization), who almost always attended ward meetings, paid dues and participated in ward life more generally. It was also the case that Kris not only attended

meetings in the following months but he also increased his donation, hosted a meeting (as all members are expected to do), and started to participate in ward life on a more intimate basis. In a sense, gossip and threats of verbal persecution seemed to have done their job in bringing Kris into the neighborhood fold and thus intimate persecution was not experienced by Kris or his family.

## **DISCUSSION: AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF INTIMATE PERSECUTION?**

In this article we have made some tentative steps towards an anthropology of persecution. Instead of starting at the top and looking down, or starting from the bottom and looking up we have utilized recent thinking in linguistic anthropology (LA) to show how both are intimately related. In so doing, we have also suggested how we can use this understanding along with LA approaches to everyday talk to start to provide more nuanced accounts of how instances of intimate persecution can develop from such talk. Even so, neither of our data sets provide us with evidence of the links between gossip and intimate persecution. A1's data falls short of having data on the persecution side, while A2's data lacks the recordings characteristic of linguistic anthropological studies.

As this is primarily a paper that explores how a "road less travelled" might contribute to work on communal violence more generally, we have not discussed how intimate violence starts to spring up in a number of places almost simultaneously or how it relates to instances of mass violence. Nevertheless, several possibilities emerge. First, what passes as 'large scale' violence may merely be multiple cases of intimate persecution. Most scholarly accounts of violence against Chinese and 'sorcerers' treated these as instances of large-scale, if not coordinated violence. We wonder whether what appears to be mass violence might often boil down to many cases of local people gossiping about the 'sorcerer' or 'Chinese' in their midst. Even if this is not the case, it seems possible to us that on the continuum of

intimate to collective persecution, much persecution is closer to the intimate pole than often appears and it seems possible that collective persecution may be tinged by intimacy at times. While eminently important these are all questions that remain for future discussion and we look forward to future dialogue with scholars interested in the host of issues surrounding persecution and violence.

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